

# The parenting lesson it took me a decade to learn

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**Kylie Orr**

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No matter how good a run you're having remember not to get smug. *Photo: Getty*

I'm into my eleventh year of parenting and although far from an authority, I've experienced a smorgasbord of childhood behaviours, parenting styles, predicaments and quandaries.

I've survived too many sleepless nights, tackled terrifying tantrums, harboured health horrors, and overreacted - or underreacted - to a carousel of concerns. I've felt the highs, the lows, the boredom and the brilliance of parenting. Yet what I keep telling myself (and any new parent who'll listen) is: don't get smug.

We've all had a smug parent cross our footpaths, probably pushing the world's best pram because they found it before it became super popular and got it on mega sale. They are the parent who thinks their child's early first tooth / brilliant new milestone / stunning hair colour / above average academic result / perfect behaviour is a direct result of their own fabulous parenting.

There was a moment in time when I thought the same thing, although I didn't have a fancy pram. The thought lasted exactly a nanosecond and then my otherwise happy two-year-old turned three and threw a string of tantrums that had me signing up to any and every parenting course on the market, and putting my name down at a mental health clinic, just as a back up. Then I went on to have three more children who all proved to me that karma doesn't just bite but stings.

I had to question: if I lay claim to my children's angelic nuances as my own doing, did I also have to own their demonic tendencies?

Children go through a million and one phases. Childhood, and in fact life, is essentially the passing of phases: infancy, babyhood, toddler years, pre-schoolers, primary kids, tweens, teens, adults. Single, married, divorced, pregnant, healthy, sick, successful, depressed, delirious, happy, jaded.

Phases. A billion trillion of them.

Some last longer than others, some are much more enjoyable than others. We have control over many and just as little power of plenty.

When it comes to parenting, we can guide and steer, we can teach and suggest but ultimately we are not the makers of our children. They have their own personalities. It doesn't mean if they are misbehaving we shrug and say "well, she's her own little person, what can I do?" But it certainly doesn't mean that if they are passing through a wonderful phase, we can take full credit.

By all means, enjoy those positive phases, breathe them in and smell all their glorious aromas, but don't get high on your own importance because it will crush your nasal passages quicker than LaToya Jackson's cosmetic surgeon.

Above all else, being smug is not the way to win friends and influence people. It just makes you look like a donkey's behind. Proud is great. Smug reeks of superiority and condescension. The arrogance of being a parent who thinks their child is above the behaviours, attitudes, skill levels or likability of their peers is extremely alienating. And stupid. No phase - good or bad - lasts forever.

My pre-schooler is currently prancing through a dress-up phase. She asked me to make her some fairy wings (being a former all-boy house, everything fairy and pink was strikingly absent). I am the antithesis of Martha Stewart so as all non-smug, modern parents do I searched the net for "homemade wings", avoided any pretty looking photo on Pinterest knowing I would never be able to replicate it, and came across a [site](#) that stepped me through making some easy (not quite fairy) ladybug wings. Aside from the simplicity of her instruction, something she said stood out:

*My goal is to support but not direct, to act as a scaffold not a blueprint.*

She was talking about children's creativity but the quote tickled my parenting bone. For if we see parenting as a support mechanism, and view our parenting selves as guides and mentors, then there is nothing to be smug about.

Go forth and be proud. If you get smug, check your shoulder for Karma – she'll be waiting there to upside the back of your head.

***What's your strongest parenting lesson?***